

ENGLAND'S GARLAND

GEORGE BARTRAM

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ENGLAND'S GARLAND



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TORONTO

ENGLAND'S GARLAND

BY

GEORGE BARTRAM

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DEDICATED
TO
THE MEMORY OF
GEORGE BORROW

602534

LITTLE can be said for these verses, except that they have been composed afield, in that abiding-place of beauty and romance, the remoter South of England.

G. B.

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THE GREEN GATEWAY



THE GREEN GATEWAY

BIG tears of Night bespangle blade and leaf,
And lover-like the dawn-breeze prompteth
me :

“ Rise, captive, rid thee of thy load of grief,
Quit thy grey dungeon, and secure relief
In yon green space that soon no more may be.

“ Haste, hie thee fieldward, and endow thy
breast

With airs of summer, whose ambrosial kiss,
Of warm South blended and of wayward
West,

Of balm of woodland and the briny zest,
Shall steep thy spirit in the olden bliss.

“ Though Grief's chill sighs thy temples have
blown bare,

And made thy manhood subject of their spoil,
Deep rest and solace steadfast wait thee
there ;

Still glows the maid's cheek in the upland air ;
The greenwood lingers in the Land of Toil.

“ Though terror travels in a dusty cloud
Upon the roadway, there is bliss anigh :
With silent alleys are the woods endowed :
With daisied carpets are the uplands proud :
The lark still carols in a maiden sky.”

A pilgrim I, by the foul city's care
Much worn, much wasted by an inward woe :
Whose eyes, so often on his griefs astare,
Now droop devoutly as the eyes of prayer,
And with their briny burden overflow.

Ay, I am even as the wretch new quit
Of dreadful durance or extremest pain,
Whose banished griefs like peering spectres yet
Around the portals of his fancy flit,
The swifter circling that they strive in vain.

A riband winding o'er wide slopes of green,
A breeze from southward, overhead serene,
Spacious, and cloudless, southern England's
sky ;

Not long the Terror that in darkness stalks
Shall vex his spirit who devoutly walks
This blithesome way, remote exceedingly.

Awake, good Fate, for me and this within
me,
In that sweet future which my hopes perpend,
Long spells of solace that shall genius win
me,
As, nerved and sanguine, southward still I
wend :

Clear thoughts—brisk banishers of cloudy
dulness,
Strong zest of palate, man-beseeming mould,
Fleet step elastic, be ye mine in fulness,
Through one deep draught at the rich breast
of old !

Green England, gracious wielder of the spell
Of pastoral beauty, janitress benign
Of blest Arcadian temples, matron-belle
Robed rich of rustic glories, it is well,
Yea, past all boasting, to be son of thine !

Remain green England, and grow rich with
store

Of peasant manhood, sow thou plenteous seed
Of such grim valour as was thine of yore ;
Be thine endowments aye and evermore
The bowering woodland and the wind-swept
mead.

Now did I crave, as comrade close of mine,
This goodly morn, in my glad way afield,
Some sun-scorched ancient tender of the vine,
Whose classic jingles of his own stored wine,
His own pressed olives, gust and odour yield.

Or some brave bard of the Provençal throng,
Some errant quirist of the Gallic grove,
To witch my journey these green wilds among
With tale romantic and with amorous song,
E'en as of old, in his own land of love :—

Or some strong by-blow of thine own rich yore,
Great Queen maternal, of that royal time
When fresh young Freedom was thy paramour,
Thy nurse old Nature, and there nestled store
Of noble bantlings in thy lap sublime :—

'Twere no presumption ; surely on this day
The silent sweetness of Elysium palls,
Rare Will is wistful of the old-time May,
Mad Kit runs over with some random lay
Of posy-beds and thrush-quired madrigals :—

And he, the brown bard, musing as he goes
Of uplands scented with the thorny bine,
Would sell Elysium for one southern rose,
And Earth's sworn Roman in his crooked
 nose
Finds leathery odours of the skins of wine.

But since the stretches of that magic sea,
That none retraceth, the fond wish with-
 stand,
Be this my comfort, joy is back with me,
Be mine own self mine own brave company,
So hey the footpath, and the good green
 land!

In this brown wallet at my hip I bear a thing
 of worth,
An ancient flask ; its womb is charged with
 germ of rime and mirth :
The noblest yield of southern vats is this
 brown wine of Spain :

And, as I mount the wide green slope, again
 and yet again
A joyous spirit whispers me, " When yon
 round knoll is won,
Let this gay vintage of the South flow
 spangling in the sun ! "

Full well I know that sward and sky, and all
 good things that be,
Shall build a nest of golden rime within the
 brain of me,
When its dull coils the grape's rich juice hath
 moistened and set free.

Aye when I gloat on England's charms, and
 taste this lordly wine,
The radiant-browed Poetic Muse is paramour
 of mine,
And greets me, from her gorgeous throne,
 with courtesies benign.

In this fair summit towering from the dale
The sylvan county closest gains to heaven,
Yet shrouded oft, when southern winds prevail,
In floating mists that on the green crest trail
Their curtains vague, by pallid sunlight riven.

All naked now the lustrous sky is spread ;
Waned to a star, as dwindling with the glow
Of torrid fervour by his strong beams shed,
The noon's fierce Soldan lords it overhead ;
Half hid in haze the valley lies below.

The hill's smooth skirt in every classic fold
Is velvet green, the summit of the swell
Green velvet intertangled with pale gold,
Sun-sprinkled pile of firmest texture, rolled
In waves of splendour indescribable.

The glorious hill is lined with stunted trees
And scented thorn, its shoulders wide beneath,
Up here bright void is, and the western breeze
Bears wayward witness of brine-laden seas
Adjacent, with each soul-inspiring breath.

Right fair the prospect from the pillow soft
Of gracious verdure, whence in flight serene
Glad Vision turns her from the blue aloft
To goodly pasture and sun-gilded croft,
O'er fern-clad dingle and embowered ravine.

Ten wondrous minutes hath a skylark hung
A bowshot o'er me, swaying in the glow :
All Earth was captive of his thrilling tongue ;
Now he dives past me in full stream of song
To that mute partner in the green below.

Gone, gone from sight ! Now Heaven and
Earth are free
Of his strong pipe, yet, hark, each dappled
throat
Of far below awakes in bush and tree ;
The deep dale teems with drowseful melody—
Faint minor chords, soul-searching strains
remote.

Low o'er the summit, like a wildered soul,
His tiny form the reckless swallow flings,
Relentless-urgent of his insect toll :
Alive around me seems the sunlit knoll
With whispers uttered by his arrowy wings.

Swift-whirling vagrant, though the bitter
scathe
Await thee sure of winter or of sea,
Bode not the salt whelm or the frost's keen
breath,
The old wild foray shall taste warm in death,
The old joy relish when the end shall be.

Fair shire, embordered by the narrow sea,
In one brave bumper I conjoin with thee
Thy comely sister, celebrate of old,
The land of cherries and the wreathing bine,
O'er whose broad bosom in a maze divine
The branching byways wander uncontrolled.

And ah, that magic powers were granted me
To call the tune and choose the company,
To summon echoes of the old refrain
That with mysterious memories enspells
And faery visions, or the far-off strain
Of chanting children and of village bells.

Or that blithe bugles from the dale below
One glorious challenge to the skies would
throw,

Then should come hither, ah, the goodly rout !
Then this lined vessel were a tertian stout,
And this poor goblet were a tankard tall,
A giant's flagon, and of gold withal !

Right welcome, ancient cloaked and bonneted,
Whose daily pitcher was of Gascon red :
Drink, till the leakage gilds thy whisker hoar,
And tell the tapster if in days of yore,
When thou wert keeper of the counter-roll,
The sovran Butler could such treasure toll.

Thy hand, strong forger of the wondrous line,
Who in thy regal garland didst entwine
With Faustus' dire damnation magic sleights
Of rural charms and pastoral delights :
Come, drink, this vintage of the gods excels
The Mermaid's malvoisies and muscadels.

Thou, amorous hermit, who so oft of old
In thy sweet verses blithely hast enrolled
The loves and graces of rurality,
I fill a flagon to the brim for thee :
Come, drink, thou wert not eager to dispraise
The vine's rich bounty, in thy mortal days.

Thou, whose keen pen with many a bitter gibe
Did pierce and slash the sycophantic tribe
Of opportunists, there were hours a few
When ruddy Ceres did thy soul renew
To cheerfuller distractions, blither whim ;
Thrice welcome, Andrew—bumpers to the
brim !

Loud-wrangling tribune, lay aside thy mask
Of strenuous challenge, couch thee nigh the
cask :

In thy brief leisure, thou of old didst glean
Full sheaves of rapture in this fair demesne :
A potent sacrament, right blest the wine,
That tips with honey such a tongue as thine.

And thou, tall roamer of green path and
lane,

Who, that she viewed thee with profound
disdain,

Held thy great purblind Mother but more
dear :

Most wondrous vagrant, gypsy chevalier,
Vain juggling this, mere moonshine mockery,
Were no mossed cushion and rich cup for
thee !

Come, drink, the tertian sheds a stream of
gold,

And I will tend ye as a slave of old,

Till this plump cask hath yielded all its wine,
And yon steep sun doth o'er the slopes
decline :

Come, drink, I serve on blithely-bended knee,
And your rare lispings my reward shall be.

The flask is empty : I have slumbered long :
The white moon stares across the shadowed
vale :

The West has wilted unto orange pale :
Gone be the goodly lords of prose and song.

And all they uttered has become a chain
Of vagrant echoes, that inconstant pass,
As flow the zephyrs through the yielding grass,
Amid the channels of my drowsy brain.

There was a precept : that I could recall
Its purport solemn ! (Those the lords of men
Shall never visit my starved soul again)
And benediction bounteous withal.

Oh, yield not this that stirs thy sanguine heart,
To the dull rabble's shallow scrutiny :
That jaded tribe can have no part with thee,
Thy thorn-fenced nosegays, or thy rugged art.

Seek thou no welcome from that alien crew,
Leave thy poor posy to the cautious test
Of English only, yet of England's best :
The tardy verdict of the royal few.

See that thy bantling wear a sober dress—
Good English homespun of the ancient time,
For much that masketh it as modern rime
Is tangled fustian, utter weariness.

Snatch thou from yore the stout simplicities
And humours strange (then England but
 drew breath
By love of life and valiant scorn of death),
Be thy quaint garland woven all of these.

STUDIES

PRELUDE

OH, I have journeyed many a mile on paths
beset by ditch and stile,
And never once the long lone way my fiddle
from its threadbare sheath
Made manumit by night or day, but hugged
it close mine arm beneath.

And when I came to yonder town I would
not strive to win renown
In that uncouth and public spot where stand
the minstrels all arow,
While none that passeth heeds a jot whether
the minstrels play or no.

It is not good that place to haunt, to view
those minstrels wan and gaunt,
Those sad-eyed harvesters of scorn, who in
the end forbear to play,
And on the hungry rocks forlorn their withered
bodies cast away.

But now that I have come to what I deem a
rare and princely spot,
Where every porch is draped with flowers,
and all the land is fair to see,
Methinks amid such radiant bowers the
audience of my heart may be.

And here for one blithe hour or so I will
employ the strings and bow :
Do thou, sweet mistress blue-bedight, and
thou, old master tall and grey,
And thou, young shapely-shouldered wight,
sit in the sun and hear me play.

And be not shamed such grace to grant for
that of number ye be scant ;
Nought doth my spirit more rejoice, for I am
one of curious mood,
Than listeners few and grave and choice—an
audience all of English blood.

And marvel not that when I play my strum-
ming fingers madly stray,
And like a charging trooper's blade mine
elbow darteth to and fro :
They who afield acquire the trade do ever
thus with strings and bow.

The tunes I play do every one in quaint and
rapid measures run :
Such is the true old English way—a winding
flood that travels free :
God send it please ye, gentles gay, as doth
the rendering gladden me.

And all were spun in secret hour beside the
solemn lichened tower,
The ivy-spangled keep that still of England's
eld is seneschal—
That standeth staunch and ever will, and
green its twining scarves withal.

List, lovers all of England's yore ; the
pointer of the dial hoar
Spells noon ; the arboured walks be strown
with eyliads from the god of day ;
And when I have my garland shown I'll
bless you all and go my way.

TWILIGHT

(1399)

WHEN moonless Night hath over Earth's
fair face

Her spell serene of magic veiling wound,
And gathered to her in a fond embrace
Sweet Silence, partner steadfast and profound,
I sit alone beneath the knotted yew,
And all the phases of my life review.

Of old I travelled o'er the wailing seas
On secret mission, eager to fulfil
For high advancement and my future ease
The wild vagaries of a bungler's will :
Right hard the service, goodly seemed the
gains,
And but experience in the end remains.

Full oft this maxim had my hopes renewed,
" When all is empty that my hands can toll,
When I all phases of this life have viewed,
And in rich numbers have revealed my soul,
And Fame has dowered me in deserved
degree,
Some English Eden shall my refuge be.

“Some den of comfort in a shire serene,
Some ancient manor that my lord shall give
To keep the garland of remembrance green
In his slave’s soul, so long as he may live :
There will I solace me, till Age’s breath
Shall waft me smoothly to the arms of Death.”

Yet all the treasures that in turn were mine
Did no staunch comfort to my bosom bring :
The joy of scheming, and the gust of wine,
The maid’s fond signal, and the scented wing
Of Fame that fanned me, and the spoils of lore,
Did leave me barren as I was before.

Alack, the profit that mine end doth hold !
My garish honours and my goodly hoards,
My curious trinkets and my chains of gold,
My scrolls emblazoned and my jewelled
swords,
Grey Usance hath devoured them, and bereft
I stand, with nothing but clear wisdom left.

With this calm corner of the monks’ domain
I have no quarrel, yet in many a spell
Of moody musing do the trick obtain,
When fails the rushlight in my lowly cell,
And lies the pageant of my past unrolled,
Of heaping curses on the ways of old.

Full oft I wonder, as I sit alone
In dreamy ambush, why I strove so long
To keep in safety on his trembling throne
That shallow weaver of chicane and wrong,
Who paid the champions of his hollow state
With barren pledges and a weakling's hate.

And thou, sly baldhead of the wintry veins,
Most perfect schemer, Paduan complete,
Who sucked the treasure of my fevered
 brains,
As tugs the urchin at the swollen teat,
For thy glib management of treachery
The pang of Naples in the bones of thee !

And ye, fair serpents, that did wind and
 weave
In fatal sequence through mine ardent soul,
Who did my heart of rosy trust bereave,
And my poor coffers at your pleasure toll,
Your arts upon ye, ye were—

—Old tyke, that sittest blowing bubbles
Of vanished pains and phantom troubles,
Which is but wittol-wise, I trow,
Amend, shake off thy dotard's burden,
Remind thee of the golden guerdon
Of the strong calm that waits thee now.

The solace won by sapient capture
 Of museful joys, the godly rapture
 Of studious days and toils serene :
 Seal firm the shrine of old abuses ;
 The heart is put to paltry uses
 That hugs the torments that have been.

What wouldest ? Pish, thy day is over ;
 Hoar sixty makes a barren lover ;
 That blissful pang shall come no mo :
 What then ? Be blithe, and bless the lovers,
 When cheek to cheek through brambly covers
 Thou viewest Giles and Gillian go.

What would'st ? When sudden pangs remind
 thee
 That some near winter's grip may bind thee
 With groaning penances forlorn,
 Some wight shall still the bar be whirling,
 Some green resound with staff and hurling,
 Some springal leap the wattled thorn.

And when to view yon turret plainly
 At bowshot range thou strivest vainly,
 So narrowed is thy vision's marge,
 Be blithe that harvest even neareth,
 When in the lustrous sky appeareth
 The full moon like a golden targe.

Though thine no more those chords of wonder
That wail and die and wake and thunder
Neath pillared roof of foreign fane,
Take heart, fair Fortune better bringeth,
The mottled starling blithely singeth
At early morn from chapel vane.

No more that thrill the full veins stirring,
When pikes be lodged and arrows whirring,
And locks the hand on hilt withal :
What then? The old man's blood shall
 rally,
When breezes through the cloisters sally,
And tempests moan in turret tall.

Far fled the gauds of silk and sable,
The bounties of the royal table,
The footstool red and broidered chair,
Yet Boniface of corner tavern
Hath rare old ale in cobwebbed cavern,
Deep down beneath the carven stair.

Take heart, old tyke, the happy liver
Forgets the fearsome past forever,
And fondly hugs the bliss at hand :
Console thee with thine own brave stories
Of taverns rare, and rustic glories,
And Beauty's reign o'er English land !

THE RANTING PILGRIM

(1591)

OLD Canterbury, many a grace benign
Thou ownest, lureful to the soul of me :
Right choice the vintage of thy cellared wine,
Red-ripe the lips of thy warm maidens be,
In gabled Mitre guarded welcome waits
Mad Marlowe's entry, yet thy classic gates
No more restrain me : lo, I ride afield—
Afield and westward by the Pilgrim's Way :
The dawn doth kindle, and the bloom of May
Askance salutes me from the bosky Weald.

A vision lures me of old Fish Street Hill ;
The rugged Boar displays his savage jowl,
The blood-red Cock a-tiptoe trumpets still,
The Black Friar's Head obtrudes from dusky
cowl :

All, staring steadfast to the eastern skies,
The Pilgrim's advent wait with hungry eyes,
But chiefly she his coming shall acclaim,
The winsome wanton plump and azure-eyed
That naked sits the amorous foam beside,
Smoothing her locks, with spangling gold
aflame.

And yet 'tis wonder that the spell should lure
Me townward, for the Gascon wine I bear
In leathern cincture at my knee secure
Is wine much better that the Masters share
In choicest conclave : certain folk avow
That certain Masters, woful bald of brow,
Are star-crowned oracles : I disagree :
I am a wayward mortal, and as such
My worldly instinct doth not favour much
Sententious rhymers who disparage me.

Still, I may travel townward : I have grown
A little weary of the rustic way :
The rustic wit, as doth the steadfast stone,
Wears moss above, below is utter clay :
What boots it dipping in the Mitre's bowl
When each stout comrade hath an empty
poll?

And yet, how wanton is the woodland rose !
Sweet Nature whispers, "Keep to Pilgrim's
Lane

The livelong summer, and more wisdom gain
In self-communion than loud London knows."

This portly partner in the leathern case,
This bosom friend, my most familiar thrall
And kindred sprite, doth dangle out of place,
And needs some tendance ere he slip and fall,
Some little easement of the bubbling load
In his round carcase at the Mitre stowed :

A pledge! I drink unto this rosy morn,
To yon wide vale with rural charms besprent,
To all the beauties of the land of Kent,
To thee, Kit Marlowe, Kentish-bred-and-
born!

Come, weave within me faery visions bright,
Strong heart's-blood of the purple must, that
still

Art more than Woman my fond soul's delight:
Oh, regal spell, that spurrest my vain will
To lightning fancies, sudden toils that seem
Mad feats and wondrous, in a raptured dream
Done but for doing's sake, most subtle Wine,
My brain's wild being, as the circling motes
In noon-spun ether, willy-nilly floats
On thy red ripples in a maze divine!

Sure, I was in thy burning clutch conceived,
And drank thee with my mother's milk, or
ne'er

Hadst thou so many languid hours relieved
With thy keen strokes of magic: even here
Thy ruddy thralls surround me, tankards rise
In circle brandished, and my swimming eyes
Do round puffed cheeks on either hand behold,
By sweet suffusion captured: voices cry,
"A speech, mad Marlowe! Ere our lips be
dry,
The drunken wisdom of thy brain unfold!"

Ho, ho ! Ho, ho ! The treasured tertians
fine

That sheering caracks o'er the Channel bring !
A noble flavour hath the Gascon wine,
Yet, when my fancy needs a subtle sting,
A riper talisman shall intervene—
The gracious malmsey from the isles serene,
Most delicate, exceeding mystical :
Yet, when brown magic can redeem no more,
I solace find in flagons running o'er
With purple vintages of Portugal.

My tongue doth stumble, and full vigour lacks
The drinker's secret truthfully to tell,
The dulcet odours of the Spanish sacks,
The cloying flavours of sweet muscadel,
The bounties pure from woodland grapes
express

In bowering Eshcol, that disciples blest
Of old did mingle for the Seer divine :
Attend, blithe toppers, to a maxim sound
From one in whom mad wisdom doth abound :
By ruddy Bacchus, there is no bad wine !

All wine is worthy, yet good drinkers say
That certain vintages superior be
To the remainder : I would tell straightway
What sort the better doth consort with me,
But setting forth unto this phantom throng
Such learned matters, taketh overlong :

The drouth of Dives doth my lips enthrall :
 A toast, brave spirits ! Sure, the grape's rich
 blood
 Can yield no ill : the worst of wine is good,
 The wine last tasted is the best of all !

Good faith, that mighty draught hath set the
 brain
 Like a scourged top a-humming in my pate :
 My sweet familiar, thy hot spells restrain :
 Adjourn the conclave to some distant date,
 And drive afar yon Bacchanals that surge
 In frantic mazes round me : bid them merge
 In air and woodland : I would be alone—
 —Alone a season with the steadfast thing
 That mutters deep within me—would be king
 For one brief hour of that which is mine own !

I know them all, grave Chapman with the sneer
 At my rank methods, and the savage trick
 Of choking genius with a tag severe
 Of learning : all his rugged verses click
 Of rusty nail and hammer : Learned fool,
 Say, is not power the hand, and lore the tool ?
 Did books forge brains, or brains build
 books ? I swear

Thou art a pedant, wilt a pedant die—
Thou, fitted less for verse than carpentry,
For all thou sittest in the censor's chair.

And thou, smug Spenser, that dost trim and
twine

With spider patience till thy verses scan
Like beads of silver strung in measured line,
Thou art, I fear me, but a charlatan :
What, thou the monarch of the sylvan lay,
Thou, tireless gilder, tuneful popinjay,
That ne'er hast heard the dappled thrush
rehearse

His early love-song, never didst acquire
The art that sets brown Gillian's cheek afire ?
Poor poetaster, bloodless as thy verse !

And thou, deep rival, that across the board
With mystic smile dost scan me, thou that
still,

Though interchanging, to thy golden hoard
Art slily adding, Straftord's subtle Will,
I cannot scorn thee, for I know thy power ;
I do not dread thee, yet in secret hour
My better angel softly whispers me,
"Bend thy strong sinews to the race begun,
Or yon calm wizard will thy speed outrun,
And clasp the laurel that should garland
thee !"

Then do I fashion resolutions stern
 Of what fools call amendment, would forego
 The hazard of the tables, would unlearn
 The lore of Aphrodite, even throw
 The wine-cup from me, cast no longing look
 To where it falleth, and by Wisdom's book
 Would order all my goings, till I frame
 Some haughty epic that shall still straightway
 The tongues that cavil, or some wondrous
 play
 That shall secure me everlasting fame.

Then rings the music of the rattling dice
 On oaken settle, or a buxom lass
 Rains smiles upon me, or the darling vice
 Allures from cincture of a purpled glass,
 And brief deprival for each honeyed sin
 A sweeter relish than of old doth win :
 Sure, broad Avernus doth with magic teem
 Of scented roses and of bubbling wine,
 And wine and roses to this heart of mine
 Do fairer toys than figured laurel seem.

And further, when such lapses fugitive
 I make into cold wisdom, and address
 Myself unto the Muses, as I live,
 I find me impotent : sheer barrenness
 Doth clasp my spirit : Fancy's rippling flood
 Ebbs dry, and lo, rank weeds and foulest mud !

My teasels in the hedgerow must remain
Or wither : outcast garlands such as mine
Must blossom vagrant, or to dust decline :
The which doth prove all reformation vain.

Indeed, this Jack-o'-Lantern gift I own
May foul me yet, for oftentime it takes
Me into pathways by the gods unknown,
And leaves me wildered, playing ducks and
drakes
With sounding phrases on the pools of
Naught,
And then some people of the learned sort
Do me mistake for other than I am,
Nor see that, even in such mood unfit,
Mad Marlowe's method closer gains to wit
Than all their monotone of epigram.

By this fair light, an I could have my way :
Oh, blithe conceit ! On bungless cask astride,
And straw-begarlanded, the livelong day—
Red Doll and tawny Joan at my side—
Through London town I would in triumph go,
And at my heels a gallimaufry tow
Of clowns and bearherds, cudgellers and
mimes,
Full-cheeked extorters of the bagpipe's drone,
Deft knights of cleaver and of marrowbone,
And rascal jongleurs, chanting ragged rhymes.

And, when the lordly tapers were aglow
 At the great conclave, I would swagger in,
 Confront the Masters seated there arow,
 The dainty Edmund with his tufted chin,
 Grim Chapman, leaning on his knotted palm,
 And that dread rival with the aspect calm ;
 Then would I bluster in the censor's seat,
 And such keen matter to their souls convey,
 In mine own random and peculiar way,
 As brings conviction sudden and complete.

As thus : " My masters, ye be men of lore,
 Each in his own fond fashion, and ye hope,
 Each in good time, that is to say, afore
 The others, up the green Parnassian slope
 To win a way : good Masters, I must own
 Few bards would lord it on the laurelled throne
 With better grace or reason, yet I pray
 Your worships' patience while Kit Marlowe
 proves
 Than that steep rut in which your wisdom
 moves
 There is a nearer and a nobler way.

" For, over and against the classic knoll,
 I do the shoulder of a mountain see,
 A dismal scarp, where many a gallant soul
 Lies chained and moaning in much misery,
 Aghast yet hopeful : a disdainous hag
 Hath foul dominion o'er that hellish crag,

And holds the key of each poor captive's
brain :

She ne'er unlocks but to bestow therein
Most maniac mischief, seed of frantic sin,
Wild follies, dread delusions, thoughts insane.

“ Betwixt Parnassus and the Hill of Woe
But space abideth of a squirrel's bound :
A thread doth bridge it, and the gulf below ?
No sight extendeth to its black profound ;
Yet o'er that fissure shall the gods' elect
By Genius guided, radiant and erect,
Pass to his bourne, and don the regal bays :
Sure, he that winneth o'er that narrow way
Must by the gods be beckoned : Masters,
say,
What reck's such traveller of your keen dis-
praise ?

“ And now, good audience, speechless in the
pews ?
Stout Chapman, thou that with thy rumbling
lines
Canst shake the spheres, and thou, whose
painted Muse
To curd and cowslips for a fee inclines :
What, silent and bestaggered both ? And
thou,
Whose toils have chafed the plumage from
thy brow ?

Thou sayest nothing, yet thou listenest well :
It hath been whispered thou hast stolen
deer ;

Steal nothing uttered by a madman here,
Lest I the secret of thy fame foretell.

“Lest in the future, when thy works have
grown

A wonder to the nations, some that strive
To go beyond their tether, of his own
By foolish practice would the Seer deprive,
And with the token of the forger's crime
Endow forever his pale front sublime :
Such eager flaunters of their wit shall be
(Opines one Marlowe that is mad) most
fain

To sift the weavings of the bigger brain
In that full future that awaiteth thee.”

Ho, ho ! I wonder if yon plumèd jay,
That like a bailiff flitteth in my track,
Will to his fellows, in his rascal way,
Recite my ravings ? An he doth, alack,
Short shrift to his tail-feathers : savage
beaks

Shall pluck and mangle when his part he
speaks :

These azured glozers have their learned
schools

Remote and regnant in some withered tree,
And each pert coxcomb shall a critic be :
Alack, the world is deadly full of fools !

“ Kr-rah ! Kr-rah ! ” Much triumph in that
note !

He hath it, garnered in his jaunty pate !
Well, there be others of a plainer coat,
And one wise hoarder steadfastly shall wait
Till I am dead, then tangle and displace
With wizard cunning, subtly interlace
My virgin sprigs with sprays divinely wove :
A world of starers shall acclaim the feat,
And then ? The laurel, and a starry seat
Blind Homer and the Mantuan above.

Heigho ! The throstle's strain from yonder
dell

Bears magic in its burden : crystal dew
Survives sun-spangled in the cowslip's bell :
The sylvan county that I travel through
Beguiles with vistas of its spacious Weald,
And this my partner sundry threads may yield
For Fancy's shuttle, from his dwindling load,
And when his burden to the dregs is quaffed
He shall be plenished with an English draught :
Good ale is plenty on the London road.

HERRICK'S SECRET

(1624)

THAT beldame, tramping through the snow,
what did she say, six months ago?
She held my hand, she scanned the lines :
“Take heed, or love will work you woe :
Think, when there comes at April dawn a
dark man through the lanes of thorn,
It is most true, though most forlorn, that
thorns amid white roses grow.

“Take heed, young damsel unafraid, for
sweethearts is a parlous trade :
Your locks show ruddy 'mid the brown, the
sun finds gold in every braid,
Bright crimson mantles in your blood, i'faith,
you be of ardent mood :
The dark man may not mean you good, take
care, nor stumble, pretty maid.”

I wonder, as I went this morn along the
flowering lanes of thorn,
What thought he, that dark cavalier who eyed
me with a glance forlorn ?

He is not old, he is not young, and, faith, he
must be slow of tongue :
So sad a swain can mean no wrong : the
gypsy is a liar born.

I deemed he might have spoken when I passed
him near the linden glen :
A smile crept round his lips and eyne : such
dullards be these modest men !
A word were better than a smile : what said
the beldame full of guile ?
Pish, I be past my teens awhile, and might
have sweethearts nine or ten.

Perchance he thinks me but some green young
daughter of a village quean,
And that to say " Good-morrow, maid," Sir
Cavalier might much bemean :
My heart, Sir Cavalier shall stare when I my
feathered beaver wear,
My jewelled ruff and stomacher, my tresses
touched with bandoline.

What said that beldame tall and strong ?
" Take heed, blithe maid, thou art but
young,
Oh, look not in the dark man's eye, for it
may end in dole and wrong ! "
I'faith, if I be young and weak I should some
stout protection seek :
Oh, that the dark man would but speak : God
help Sir Silent to a tongue !

So it were that I could define the courses that
my years should run,
I would yon house of the whelming vine, its
gardens and its fields were mine,
Its terraced spaces broad and fine, its meadows
waving 'neath the sun.

So I could a comelier fate declare, of amorous
converse what would I ?
I would yon maid with the auburn hair, my
pleasures and my toils to share,
To make me blithe beyond compare, and love
me till I come to die.

Your frills, young maid, they were all askew,
your scarlet slippers down at heel ;
The leaves had shed bright tears of dew on
that old gown of dappled blue
That fitted your fine shape so true, sweet
country maid in deshabelle.

What thought had lured you from your
white bed in that fair chamber 'neath
the vine,
And your swift steps by the lindens led, to
fill with dreams this learned head,
And plant the Paphian arrow dread in this
reluctant heart of mine ?

For you have reached but the fifth bright
teen, your April is not yet half-blown :
Sport not with love in your girlhood green,
for what the pleasant game may mean,
How deadly dire its forfeits keen, you yet,
methinks, have nothing known.

When first in shadow of linden glade I viewed
thee pass thy chamber fro,
Had my struck heart its pangs betrayed, what
wouldst thou in thy shame have said ?
Methinks my sweet had been dismayed : 'tis
better far it was not so.

Yet come thou still from the trellised court,
and pass thou still by the bowering tree :
I will not harm thee in deed or thought :
pass, rosy flutterer, still uncaught :
Such wile were sin of deadliest sort, yet pass
thou still, to comfort me !

Oh, thou, that dost thy wandering swain
allure
To vigils weary as the nights be long,
No more of hindrance may hot love endure :
Nay, thou shalt listen, and perpend my
wrong.

Why did I woo thee, when fond hope did seem,
Of such sweet favour, fool-wrought fantasy
Vague and misguideful as an idiot dream ?
Alack, I know not, save it was to be.

How sore my sorrows ? Such the biting pain,
Words may not tell it, but the leech shall
 know
Whose keen knife passeth through dead bone
 and vein :
The heart all bloodless—the wan heart will
 show.

How deep my love ? Christ's blood, 'twere
 wondrous skill
To know this urgent fever of the mind,
That sinks and rallies, yet can ne'er lie still,
For love or madness, or the twain combined.

What saith my lady, standing there apart,
My soul's enchantress, fair exceedingly,
Remote tormentor of a steadfast heart,
What saith my lady to poor listening me ?

Sad swain, content thee, nor my faith indict,
But think thou kindly on the sweet times gone :
Oft have I stolen to thee in the night :
Are my stray kisses from thy hot lips flown ?

My kinsmen, steadfast in their clownish pride,
Would slay thee, lurker in the lanes of thorn,
Yet I did meet thee at the covert side :
An thou forgettest, sure thou art forsworn.

Though oft in durance I may bide afar,
While thou dost errant in the darkness roam,
The deep thought dwelleth on the distant star ;
My soul dreams of thee and blithe hours to
 come.

Still lurk thou, sweetheart, in the leavy glade :
The hour most lonely may the best hour be,
The hour when, urgent of the bliss delayed,
I yield me captive to the night and thee.

Thus spake the bell that, from the steeple
 tolling,
In iterance mournful to my soul appealed ;
The dolorous bell, in urgent measure knolling,
To my sad spirit thus its strain revealed :
 “ Dead ! Dead ! Love lies dead !

“ Sigh not for stately sire and gentle mother,
By Death's cold talons strangled in their prime,
Mourn ye no more for him, the comely brother,
Weep for the maiden dead before her time :
 Gone ! Gone ! Cold as stone !

“ Her smile was like the look divine that
 lingers
On seraph faces, master-limned of yore,
Her warm young heart, now prize of Death's
 cold fingers,
Was pure red love from rim to tender core :
 Dead and gone ! Dead and gone !

“ In lily chains the loving hands have bound her,
In stainless shroud her snowy limbs comprest,
But, ah, to tie the ruddy girdle round her,
And pin the rosebud on her marbled breast :
 Would it were so ! Would it were so !

“ The girdle red, the blood-red roselet peeping
From its green cincture, argument implied
That she, whose going drowned all eyes in
 weeping,
Had blessed her lover ere she drooped and
 died :
 Then all were well : ” thus spake the bell.

If any other in such misery go
As mine, God help him, ere he droop, and grow
Sick, sick of life, and eager of the doom
Oblivious ; through the narrow ways of grief
But my base body holdeth circuit brief ;
My soul lies locked with Doris in the tomb.

Ware ye the colour that doth come and go
As gleams the waning sunlight on the snow ;
Death lurks in ambush of the cypress near :
Thus glowed her father, stately as the pine,
Her beauteous mother with the brow benign,
Her brother, stalwart as the harnessed steer.

Than her cheeks' glory never a rose of fame
In Persian garden with a redder flame
Burned, lit by sun-lance through green arbour
thrust :
Sire, dame, and brother, from the rich stalk
reft—
Not one bright blossom of the cluster left :
Alack, the grim gods, and their righteous lust!

Vile nettles flourish in foul corners still,
The dwarf crab prospers on the sedgy hill,
The thistle tarries, long endures the weed,
But all rich products and all things of worth
Have brief survival on this sinful earth :
Thus in their wisdom have the gods decreed.

Full soon the only green shall be of holly :
Would it were spring, and I a pilgrim jolly
In lanes with thorny splendours overflown ;
Would it were May, the first of Spring's sweet
waning,

And lark and thrush their dappled bosoms
 straining
To soothe my spirit as I walk alone.

The bonny thrush, that singeth as a lover,
While his meek mate, afar in brambly cover,
Four fruits of love in her warm wings doth
 fold,
Would it were with me as with that bold
 sweeting,
To spend my summer in the fond entreating
Of her who loved me in the days of old !

Soon shall grey Winter's tempests strong and
 savage
The bleak hills scour, the withered woodlands
 ravage,
Yet Spring's mild rains their splendours shall
 restore,
Warm downy breasts with love's soft joys be
 shaken,
Chilled turf and twig in glories green awaken,
But that fond transport shall be mine no
 more.

Alack, the trouble ! Ah, the weary linking
Of woe and fancy, that do come by thinking
The old thoughts over, the old times upon,
The rosy visions that awake to perish,
Poor phantom flowerings of the grief I cherish
For that sweet mistress who is dead and gone !

Young maid, that didst with many a token
tender

Thy heart's rich bounty to my search surrender,
And tune my senses to delights serene,
The cold earth heaped beside the drooping
willow

Is thy dank tent, the oozy clay thy pillow,
Thy tablet captive of the ivy green.

Now all fond tokens of love's rosy glamour
In other maids, that other swains enamour,
My soul renounceth, aye and evermore :
For me the byways and green alleys only,
There walk I ever as a muser lonely,
And feed my fancies with the dreams of yore.

An I were done with tears and laughter, and
with the classic-laurelled She,
What would a fit and blithe hereafter for my
fond bosom's captive be ?
Stout faith is mine the cold black river, that
drowns the dullard's soul forever,
In its drear flood's embraces never shall overwhelm
and swallow the soul of me.

This something quick that burns within me
for lofty joys would little care,
And God's sweet grace shall freedom win me
from such foul pains as devils share :

I mind me of the learned Roman : a few
sharp blows at lurking foemen—

A few sweet slips with wine and woman—one
poor Peccavi quittance were.

Not mine the rabble's meed of glory : I would
not, faith, that man might know

My place of rest, save delvers hoary, the
foster-mates of long ago :

So deep my grave the roots between of ancient
alders stout and green

That it shall aye endure unseen of him that
passeth to and fro.

And good it were my wayward spirit, when
sextons twain had prayed and gone,

Its mouldering casket might inherit, should
rest and utter silence own,

Till flesh to shroud and bone to clay were
welded close by calm Decay,

That knitter slow by night and day, and all
dead items were as one.

That then, some April morn unclouded, when
Joy was queen of land and sea,

The maid so long with mould enshrouded
should spectral come and call to me,

“Why sleepest thou, my love, so long, the
clods and rushes dank among ?

Arise, the throstle is in song : arise, thy Doris
waiteth thee ! ”

And if the cruel Fates should shiver with
sudden stroke the links of yore,
And break our tryst beside the river, when
that fond day of love was o'er,
Methinks her soul might peaceful lie for aye
the brooding willows by,
And mine the stream of darkness nigh, for
ever and for evermore.

THE LEVELLER

(1652)

IN glade remote of greenwood olden, long
miles away from road and town,
When wheat is sere and barley golden, and
Sol hath burned the pastures brown,
Most sweet it is to walk, when dies the
splendour of the western skies.

Tall elm and beech, the white birch limber,
the ash thick hung with golden keys,
The sturdy oak, stout lord of timber, the
goodly glade is rich in these,
But the dark yew is king enorm, whence fork
the alleys cruciform.

Foul waifs of crime its dark boughs cover—
vile brigands all of earth and sky—
The bloody stoat and keen windhover, the
cruel shrike and faithless pie,
Rat, mouldwarp, vixen, owl, and jay, hang
black and stark on trunk and spray.

When Luna's beams the sward bespangle,
and dew drips fast from frond and tree,
The rides that from the lone yew angle be
four long lanes of gramarye,
The golden light such glory weaves with
ghostly trunks and tangled leaves.

Then as I go I sadly ponder the mystery of
that sombre tree :
"Oh, cursèd caitiffs hanging yonder," I cry,
"your hellish cruelty
At last hath gained fit punishment, but they,
so foully slain and rent ?

"Blithe acolytes of Dawn's red wicket, fond
troubadours of bush and bough,
Sweet choristers of glade and thicket, the
world was fain of them, I trow :
Nought can restore to woods and banks their
tuneful sleights and gentle pranks."

When peers the dawn through mist and
shadow, and fade the stars in quickening
blue,
When white webs garland spray and meadow,
and sings the wren from boughs of yew,
No tears of loving Night are seen on those
black spots amid the green !

When mist and shadow in the west retreat,
And teems the orient with ensanguined glow,
I find the village of the terraced street,
Quaint past comparing, gloriously replete
With rustic graces of the long ago.

Its bordering downs in vernal months be rife
Of daisied splendour and the skylark's glee ;
No traffic meddles with its drowsy life,
No hint of turmoil, save the distant strife
And shoreward clamour of the sunlit sea.

Its gabled cots their reverend brows obtrude
From hoods of ivy, and the windmill tall
Wheels mid the cloudlets, and the shorings
rude
Of wall and gateway be of jetsam wood—
Black oak of Eld, and quaintly carven all.

Its hoary turret on the crowning steep
Is ivy-drapen, battlement to sill,
And decked with angels that forever weep
Great stony tears for victims of the deep—
The deep relentless and insatiate still.

Rich-dowered its nave with many a foreword
blest
Of sweet forgiveness and immortal balms—
Celestial drops on Calvary expressed—
—Bright crowns of victory, and eternal rest
In Abram's bosom or Immanuel's arms.

The comely haven called the Bell looks west-
ward with an aspect brave :
From its rose-cinctured oriel I gaze afar o'er
strand and wave :
Dark be its rooms, the curtains cloak deep
mullions wrought in strange design ;
Dark be the pictures framed in oak : no man
their meaning may divine.

Mine host is one of limb immense and stately
paunch ; his features red
Glow moon-round, radiant evidence of health
and peaceful nights abed :
Plump worthies, sodden of repose, o' nights
keep with him festival,
Ripe ancients and of ruby nose, sound, sturdy
cogers, one and all.

And shake their sides with thunderous glee
mine host and guests, a cosy ring
In parlour lit with tapers three, while loud
the western gale doth sing :
The senior with the rheumy eye his story tells
of wondrous span,
With " I said," " He said," and " Said I," and
ends him where his tale began.

I have a chamber in this tavern rare,
The downy pillows reek of lavender,
The window opens on the briny west :

Each summer's morning yields my slumber
fair
To sweet incursions of the upland air,
And wayward carols from the swallow's breast.

The goodly garden is a furlong wide,
With bedded flowerets primly beautified,
And rich the scent of wall-embowering rose,
Huge be the thick-hedged mazes, where abide
In unexpected spots on every side
Warm woodbined nooks, blest arbours of
repose.

Yon dell deep witchery for my senses
spins ;
“Come, come,” it murmurs, “man of many
sins,
Come, know my bounties, and thy youth
renew !”
Afar its bosom the vast upland heaves,
With one broad cleft through which the eye
perceives
A faery sail, becalmed in tranquil blue.

Yet must my soul with penitence confess
Some sour reminder of stale weariness
Intrudeth ever, as through rosiest dream
The grey ghost stalketh : still the old distress,
Though sky and summer bounteously express
What should be solace endless and supreme !

Oh, Mistress Nature, in thine every kiss
Some tang of sorrow doth pervade the bliss
My drouthy spirit would unstinted know :
In highest transport something is amiss,
In fields Elysian I should find, I wis,
Some element provocative of woe.

What would I, wistful, of the brawling town ?
Brave hearts I cherished, basely stricken down,
Stout souls defeated, much beloved of me,
Wise men and true men, by unfeeling knaves
Despoiled, and treated as desertless slaves :
Would ye were with me : happy I could be !

When I sit musing by yon windmill tall,
Or by the beacon on the breezy hill,
Right glorious visions do my soul enthral :
The old fond cravings tarry with me still.

Christ's wounds, the rapture of that youthful
prime,
When straight and sunlit did the pathway lie
For my stout footsteps, and the goal sublime
Seemed wondrous radiant and exceeding nigh !

Then comes a whisper penetrant and strong :
"Relinquish not thy soaring soul's desire :
Not endless be the weary ways of wrong
That thy bold purpose hinder and bemire :

“Though clouds thy strivings baffle and
obscure,
Though turn and quit thee many of thy
friends,
Still not for ever shall ill luck endure :
The Right shall conquer : Time will make
amends !”

To that rich end of my fondest scheming,
That noble muster that still may be,
When the barns be full, and the orchards
teeming,
And homeward saileth the argosy,
Say, who shall come, with no denial,
The wreath to wear, and tune the viol,
And taste the banquet, the goodly banquet,
A world enraptured shall set for me ?

The steadfast souls that did once attend me
And my poor thankings full bounty deem,
The silent sworders that did befriend me
In stress of combat and plight extreme,
The good stout foes whom, half in sorrow,
I struck to earth, and yet the morrow
Locked hands and laughed with, clinked cup
and quaffed with,
Such guests would surely my halls beseem !

Ay, these shall sit at the table's border :
What joyful service shall then be mine ?
But to trim the lamps, and the trenchers order,
To carve the capon, and serve the wine :
Thus will I toil, in very seeming
Of humblest groom, the while all deeming
Some broidered stranger the feast's arranger,
Some errant masquer the host benign.

The vine of Luck is of all men's training,
Though he who gathers small toil hath known;
All rule o'er man is of men's sustaining ;
The peasant's shoulder upbears the throne :
Then open wide your heart's rich portals,
Ye kings of men, that fellow mortals
May taste, unknowing, their hands' bestowing,
And reap as bounty what is their own.

COBBETT'S GRANDSIRE

(1726)

FROST in the furrow, darkness in the sky,
Harsh wind across the moorland ; to and fro
In the keen air the ragged waifs of snow
Like morris-dancers travel ; stark and dry
Black Gilbert's relics in their cage on high
From the bleak gibbet dangle evermo.

Thus saith the Ruler : “ Darkness, want, and
cold
For thee, worn wrestler with the hungry soil,
For thee, chained shearer of the golden spoil,
And if, in some mad season overbold,
Thou wouldst avenge thee, the dire snake of
old
Shall crush thy body in his deadly coil.

“ Conceived in bondage, peasant-bred-and-
born,
Cold-nurtured and mishandled, thou didst grow
To be my chattel, doomed to delve and sow

And reap, yet, reaping, stand aloof forlorn
From the full garner, sleep until the morn,
And yet again unto thy delving go."

Avaunt, old Tyrant ! Though some truth
may hold

In thy stern mandate, there be precious strains
Of full salvation in remoter veins
Than thou canst search : when skies are black
and cold

Brown bread and bacon relish, and the old
Heart's-blood of barley double virtue gains.

What though my lordly masters may me
deem

A dullard lout ? The fruit of Mary born
By haughty Pharisees was held in scorn :
To fleering fools all folk of virtue seem,
The more their value, of the less esteem :
The bungler prospers, and the knave forsworn.

Ay, I have treasures gold can never buy,
Nor rank be sure of, appetite complete
And labour-sharpened ; thus the grainy meat
From the hog's jowl to me is savoury ;
Keen thirst, that makes the tongue grow
desert-dry,
And the sour apple's vintage nectar-sweet.

And as my training was so wondrous bare
Of ease and shelter, love with me is strong :
My youth knew nothing of the leprous wrong :
My hours of rapture are exceeding rare :
Love greets me seldom, yet be well aware
He comes full-handed, and he tarries long.

Thus rosy Gillian doth my powers attest,
And our poor cradle with love's treasures fill :
She, turned of forty, is my sweetheart still,
My lureful partner with the gracious breast,
That crooneth blithely o'er her teeming nest,
"It was to be, love : it is God's good will !" ¹

And when old Curfew hath a warning cried,
When fades the rushlight, and the fire is low,
A brooding angel taketh me in tow,
And lulls my cares at drowsy Gillian's side :
No richer bounty doth the Lord provide
Than the sweet slumber His poor people know.

When my pale Ruler on his downy bed
At daybreak strives to win the sleep denied
Through hours of darkness, what doth me
betide ?

I hear the brown lark carol overhead :
No palace owns such carpets as I tread—
The meads with God's own jewels beautified.

¹ The favourite answer of the old peasantry, when reproached by Malthusians, was, "It is the will of God."

The townsmen marvel at my language strange,
Yet in my rugged method lies enrolled
The good pure English of the days of
old,
For I am one that doth not quickly change :
I hoard the title of each hill and grange
As misers clutch imperilled bags of gold.

And I am pregnant of devices rare
That do not work for evil, I have skill
For Nature's chattels duly to fulfil
Each necessary office, I prepare
The path of Comfort with exceeding care :
Such is my mission : it is God's good will.

And mark ye, masters, though my very
reins
Be wrung with labour, I am wondrous
hale,¹
Can bear huge burdens, swing a tireless
flail,
And toss fat sheaves upon the loaded wains :
God willed it thus : when strength no more
remains
With her brown peasants, England's power
shall fail.

¹ "The Common People" (of England) "will endure long and hard Labour ; insomuch that after 12 Hours' hard Work they will go in the Evening to Football, Stoolball, Cricket, Prison-base, Wrestling, Cudgel-playing, or some such like vehement Exercise, for their Recreation."—*Chamberlayne*, 1727.

I am no dolt, but with my knotted stick
Can foil a sworder, and with trip of toe
Can lay the best man of a city low :
All sleights of fence, and every heave and click
Of wrestler's science, every manful trick,
Doth stout old England to her peasants owe.

I am no coward : many a cup to brink
With War's red mischief loaded (and for
 what ?
That thieves in safety may the spoils allot
Of my stern valour) to the dregs I drink :
Say, doth the peasant at the potion blink ?
Who says it is a liar misbegot.

What then, my lords ? Your humble servant
 sees
His lean bent carcase and its works abound
In such fair uses as may not be found
'Mong folk who flourish titles and degrees :
So cheap his blood, so strong his services,
He comes to think he makes the world go
 round.

And still he whines not, nor makes tawdry
 show
Of his staunch merits, does not go abroad,
His tabard glowing with the schemer's gaud,
And prating ever, that the world may know,
"Lo, I am he that hath done so-and-so,"
(Some foolish feat) "and where is my reward ?"

Anan ? Your worships would your wits
review,

Some little to requite me ? Masters, pray
Be not too hasty, but, some empty day,
When ye are tired of twisting all askew
The State's trim branches, there be things a few,
And your poor servant will for ever pray.

And first, yon kind of meddling Puritan
Without old Noll's long sword, that doth
repine

Against the grape because it yieldeth wine,
And our tall Maypole with much malice scan,
I pray you, drive afar that meddling man
Who would heap sadness upon me and mine.

For, look ye, masters, though the grape's rich
leaven

Be not my portion, ale is dear to me :
With ale to cheer me, I perform with glee
My hard endeavours, and yon forty-seven-
-Foot pole flower - wreathed hath pointed
straight to Heaven

Since God knows when, that knoweth more
than we.

Yon louring pedant with the gouty knees
And flaming face hath had it long in thought
To fence the green to which my sons resort
To leap and wrestle ; good my masters, please
Deprive him of his devil's dignities :
He means me mischief of a deadly sort.

For it is ever yon vile meddler's way
With cold contrivance and foul quibblery
To girdle aught that practice maketh free :
The poor's poor havings are the lawyer's
 prey,
The fair broad common and the right of
 way
His lore transmuteth to a golden fee.

Remember, in the dividend of yore
Mine was a paltry portion ; it hath grown
Much meaner since—this trifle small alone
To my poor credit still is carried o'er—
By Heaven, if ye pare the balance more,
I shall have nothing I can call mine own !

In sooth, your lordships, though you have a
 knack
That galls the withers, more than I can tell
Have I adored you, you that bear the bell
So bravely, riding on my rounded back :
I would esteem might tarry, but, alack,
Your trusted minions do not mean me well.

And every rogue that cometh with a scheme
That tends to pillage in some slight degree
May have consideration, and make free,
As doth your mouser with the bowl of cream,
With my poor treasures, while your worships
 deem
The same foul mischief doth advantage me.

Some few tricks other, in your moods austere,
Your wit plays with me : I must bear me so,
With naked noddle, when your lordships go
In glory past me, and your vengeance fear
If one stray arrow at the browsing deer
I launch at midnight from my father's bow.

But chiefly doth memorialist bewail
Your skill in misdirection, when the mood
Of bounty takes you, and you sour his blood
With childish books, and sermons wondrous
 stale,
The while you turn his treasured cup of ale
Fair upside down, for your poor servant's good.

Sure, if there ever doth pervade your dreams
A vision charitable, it should be
Such bounty as will suit the whims of *me*—
Of such poor sort as your poor slave *esteems*—
Faith, other than the thing he craveth seems
But stones for bread, sour whey for eau-de-vie !

Alack, my masters, angered to the vein
That your sad suitor doth his woes relate,
And yet—"Some secret bounty shall await
His poor petition?" It were worse than vain
To press you further, but the Lord restrain
Such bitter bounty as you contemplate !

Your slave withdraweth, and your usance keen
Enshrined in remembrance : Jesu grant
That no new meddlers may your reign supplant !
Better to drudge it to the end, I ween,
With the calm devil that so long hath been,
Than ten weak devils madly ministrant !

The night falls swiftly, o'er the countryside
The black North screeches : God's good care
betide

Poor souls seafaring, wanderers in the snow :
God help the shepherd and his huddling flock,
God guard the trader from the beetling rock,
God guide Jack Smuggler with his tubs in tow !

God free old England from devices base
Of such as traffic liberty for place,
(Foul leering lawyers, rulers infidel)
And, should His wisdom further grant relief,
Be they accounted creditors-in-chief—
The good stout churls who serve the Lord so
well !

Now hie thee, briskly, to the haven sweet
Where Gillian waiteth with her brood to greet
The goodman coming from his toil afar :
Frost in the furrow, tempest overhead,
White drift to windward, yet a finger red
Doth beckon blithely from the door ajar.

TO THE WILDERNESS

(1826)

IN this bare garret grime-befouled and grey
An idiot bondage doth my soul enthrall,
Self-chained I linger, doleful day by day,
Forlornest drudge and veriest slave of all.

Ah, bitter gleanings of the musty tomes :
Ah, bootless ploughing of the furrows dry !
Yon hoary beetle that at leisure roams
The crumbled ceiling, happier is than I.

The quick dust stirreth on the bindings brown,
Dull vision teemeth with the circling mote,
The book-moth dwelleth in my curled crown,
I taste dead Caxton in my fevered throat.

Still books and books, and worser books again,
And books shall come hereafter, worse and
worse :

A curse on books—on they who would by men
For them be honoured, still a deeper curse !

Our noble fathers made the mystic cross
At foot of quittance, yet were bold and sage :
They had no learning, and they knew no loss :
Had I been tenant of that golden age—

—Behold me coursing with uplifted eyes,
And wind-stirred lovelocks, o'er the rolling
 mead,
My falcon swooping from the sunlit skies :
Sure, that were wisdom—that were lore indeed !

Behold me monarch of the midland wood,
My lair a corner of the clefted dene,
My whittle ruddy with the fallow's blood,
My yeomen gallant in the Lincoln green.

Behold me—Dotard, that dost weave inane
Sick dreams to fool thee, as the prisoned fly
With bruised wing drummeth on the viewless
 pane,
The open door of airy egress nigh !

I sat in bondage of a sleepless spell
Beside the casement, till the monster bell
With clang sonorous struck the hour of one.

Above, the blue was thick with golden eyes
That seemed to watch me, in the lower skies
Through anchored cloudlets ghostly Luna
 shone.

Beyond the angle of the shadowed quoin
A figure flitted, tall, and lank of loin,
With black locks floating, though the air was
calm,

Stood peering upward, closer did advance,
Then leaped and gambolled in an eerie dance,
With circling footsteps and with beckoning
arm.

And, as with giddy movement and career
It ran and bounded in the moonglow clear,
The whirling and the posturing did beget

Strange sounds and courses in my gladdened
brain,
Strong chords melodious, and a swift refrain
Of tambourine and clicking castanet.

And still that figure with the long black hair
Loose floating, and the lambent eyes astare
In the wan moonlight, steadfast signalled me

With gleeful gestures, and to my grey soul
Like sea-spent swallows lureful whispers
stole—
Strange tokens, spun of gypsy gramarye.

*“ These shall be thine, the joys of sky and air,
Of day and night, of upland and of glade,
The headlong gallop through the roaring fair,
The lit encampment, and the solace rare
Of stout companion and of buxom maid :
Blithe is the greenwood !*

*“ The nights autumnal, when his giant wings
The mad West urges, and the clouds are rolled
Pell-mell in glory, while the pale moon swings
To sudden vision, and beneath her flings
Fleet-travelling glooms, swift splendours mani-
fold :
Wide is the moorland !*

*“ The bleak wet weather, when in sheer despite
The moon sinks darkling, whelmed and overflown
By rack and tempest, and deserted Night
Goes mad with weeping that she has no light,
Storm-hooded sitting on her sombre throne :
Red glows the camp-fire !*

*“ The moonless mornings, harsh and cold and
dry,
The rime-hung mornings, when the powdery snow
Creaks shrill at treading, and the stars seem
nigh,
So keen their lustre, and the pallid sky
Is pregnant earthward of the boreal glow :
Fleet is the lurcher !*

*“ Along the turnpike, and across the lane,
The patteran windeth, thence adown the glen :
Wouldst thou win freedom from the grinding pain ?
Wouldst thou the madness that is nigh restrain ?
Come forth, and mingle with King Pharaoh's men :
Right glad the welcome !*

*“ Fain be thy sinews for the free career,
Thy palate waters for the midnight stew,
Heap thy mad weavings on the embers clear,
Smite the proud huckster on his knotted ear,
And hie thee roaming with the gypsy crew :
King Pharaoh calleth ! ”*

And as that figure, signalling again,
Whirled back to darkness from my dazzled ken,
The wild strains dwindled, and the spell was
o'er :

I cast me, giddy, on my lonely bed,
Yet sleep I could not, for my fevered head
Was thronged with secrets of the gypsy lore.

*Thus crooked runs the code of Rommany,
“ Cajole the gorgio, but keep steadfast faith
With gypsy comrades : such as wear the eye
That twinkling vieweth jovial knavery,
Throw wide the tent, and beckon them beneath !*

*"The stone-blind pismire lives to work alway :
What gains the pismire of her foolish toil ?
'Sweet be her eggs,' bear witness rook and jay :
The bee stores honey for a winter's day,
And Brock the badger wallows in the spoil.*

*"'Staunch toil is glory' ; this the wise attest :
Leave ye such glory for poor folk to come :
Asquint endure the wizened knave's behest
That drones such doctrine : ambush warm is best
In glade convenient : there his chickens roam.*

*"Take ye great pleasure in the comely wife
And black-browed children, glowing through
their tan :
Live free and hardy and in love with life :
Own but one terror, Death's dissevering knife :
Dread ye cold Death, who have no fear of man !"*

What sayeth Wisdom? "If thou wilt but wed
Old Mammon's daughter, rich rewards incline
Of spacious orchards ruddied overhead,
And cellars fragrant of the comet wine.

*"Of cloaks of velvet, edged with costly fur,
Of priceless curios, all of crystal clear,
Of elm-fringed pastures, and of parks astir
With scuttling conies and with roaming deer."*

But, beard of Pharaoh, little do I care
For e'er a pleasure that such schemes provide,
When I have prospect of a cosy lair
'Mid rustling grasses at brown Rachel's side :

There is a ballad that the sibyls troll
'Mid crowding shadows when the fire is low :
Black is the secret of the gypsy's soul,
And they who listen shall the secret know.

*" Come, tell my fortune," said the lady fine,
And thus the dark dame did the tokens spell :
" If your fool's future lay in hands of mine,
It were a future that should fit you well.*

*" No broidered pillow for my lady's head,
No rustling flimsies should my lady wear,
But rise up groaning from a stubble bed,
And walk the turnpike with her soft feet bare.*

*" And, for the solace of her sick desire,
No smooth-faced stroller of the crowded chong,
But Devil Ishmael for my lady's squire,
To tame her humours with the snapping thong.*

*" The dust should harbour in her braided crest,
The hot glare shrivel up her painted skin,
The cold rain trickle down her padded breast,
And black frost wither the false heart within.*

*“The staff should bruise her, and the burden
bow*

*Her thin weak shoulders, and her fare should be
The poorest portion from the poisoned sow :
Thus should my lady : all our tribe should see :
Thus should my lady, if it lay with me !”*

I tracked the mazes of the tiny burn,
Breast-deep in billows of the rustling fern,
To where the ruddy and insistent star
Shone like a signal in the glade afar.

Dark Miriam, buxom as a Moorish queen,
Her face transfigured in the scarlet sheen,
Her rom recumbent, with inquiring glance
From shadowed forelocks savagely askance—

—Two children peering from a couch of
broom,

Dark Miriam's mother with the brow of
doom,

Her tresses reaching to her brawny hips,
The old, old lure-note on her lying lips.

*“Your comely shadow through my dreams did
go :*

*I viewed your picture in the ember-glow :
The running water made the tokens three :
Come, cross my fingers with the silver fee !”*

Sweet Heav'n, they scanned me as the white
owl glares
Upon the quarry that his sharp beak tears,
Then round and round me in the darkness
stole,
Like devils charming of a wayward soul !

I own the manner that with ease deludes
Rogues into comrades, sudden touch can
gain
With all the passions and peculiar moods
Of these dark haunters of the bowering
woods :
There lurketh in me of the gypsy strain.

Of all quaint antics and Bohemian trades
I can the mystery occult divine :
All outlawed lurkers in the leafy glades,
All merry mumpers, and all roving blades,
At earliest speech are bosom friends of mine.

*"Come close," they cry, "tall lad of silver
tongue :*

*Come, sit within, we need a patrico ;
Most foul the woodland, and the way o'er-
long,*

*The cauldron bubbles, and the night is young :
Come, harbour with us till we bid ye go !*

*“ Come close, good fortune to the time ye stay :
Come, harbour, harbour, quit the life forlorn :
The strain is in ye of that golden day
When comely Madam in the woods did stray :
This side the threshold was your grandsire born ! ”*

This one poor relic of a treasured store
From my grey dungeon yesternight I bore :
See thou, King Pharaoh, plenty here be found
To fill the flagon for a double round !

Sure, this rich odour that the pot exhales
Of leek and chicken tells convincing tales,
And whose the chickens and the leeks might
be,
Ere Miriam pouched 'em, shall not trouble me.

For know, brave members of the filching crew,
While ye pouch boldly for your midnight stew,
The rascal gorgio doth his ends obtain
By trick and trimming and devout chicane.

A health, dark Romans, if my wish were law,
Your lureful campfires in each bosky shaw
Should glow at midnight, and the Great
White Chord ¹
Have grassy fringes of a furlong broad.

¹ The North Road.

Red star of glory, that hast warmed this
bowl,

Lodge thy deep magic in the truant's soul :
Blest zone of darkness, ever from my view
Shut out the terrors that of old I knew !

VALEDICTION

WHAT weakling urges that the starry nights
In woodland wanton with the joyous sprites,
In meadow peopled with the tripping fays,

Have fled forever, and our souls are borne
In endless circuit of the streets forlorn?
Who sings a requiem for the golden days?

Though now no longer amid alleys green
Brave hearts go riding, and the kisses keen
Of sun and tempest uncomplaining share,

Though doubts delude us, and by deadly rote
We learn Life's lesson, in stray hearts remote
The sylvan secret lingers unaware.

Though Ruin grapples with the nooks of yore,
Some sudden magic may the same restore,
The hearths replenish with the olden fires :

Some vagrant wizard may the track pursue,
The maze unravel, and the spell renew,
And wake the singing of the vanished quires.

Ah, Christ, for succour of a magic scroll
And gift of genius, to expend my soul
In subtle conquest of the ravished string,

On towering viol of the ancient mould,
In panelled chamber by the Kentish wold,
Till every rafter to its core should ring !

Awake, loud carols lordly Chanticleer,
The bells of travel jingle keen and clear,
The south wind dallies with the Tabard sign :

Our sins be many : what of that ? I trow
Young April glistens upon sward and bough,
And, lo, the green path to A'Becket's shrine !

Awake, L'Allegro, and thy glowing eyes
Upturn in rapture to the vernal skies :
Rich glamour greets thee of the lengthening
days :

Blithe England's maidhood has endured thus
long
In buxom freshness : lovely still as young,
Thy youth's enchantress her warm cheek dis-
plays.

Attend, old Valour doth his spells unchain,
Hoarse is the murmur of the brooding main
By the tall headland, plaintively doth yearn

The straining cordage, and the tautened sail
Sighs loud in labour, whistles wild the gale :
Deck-deep with treasure Anson doth return.

Unwind, broad magic of the sylvan muse,
With rural raptures every chord infuse,
Old Sussex revels in the clasp of Spring,

All green-and-golden is the rolling down,
The oak is royal with its burgeons brown,
Afar clear-throated doth the cuckoo sing.

Come, weave in riot ; with its vernal snows
The thorn is laden, and the woodland rose
Aflame with sunlight, drenched with lustral
dew :

The brown bird watches from the shading grass
Her minstrel gallant circle and repass
Above her, questing of the boundless blue.

Who wails deprival of the days of gold ?
As virgin-lovely as in prime of old
Our Lady signals : lo, the dwarfish yews

Still mark the channel of the Pilgrim's Lane :
The South still beckons, shall she call in
vain ?

What narrow pedant prompts ye to refuse ?

Vast Tree of Empire, shallow hirelings say
The sign is on thee of a swift decay,
That, foul and secret at thy deepest core,

Dread canker nestles of the worm of doom,
And thou art barren of the goodly bloom
Thy olden vigour in such bounty bore.

That they who fondly in this evil time
Would weave thee garlands of thy wondrous
prime
Aloof and haggard with their gifts shall stand,

For their own birthright intercessors vain,
Thrice-branded outlaws in their own domain,
Waifs unregarded on their native strand.

It is not so : thy heart is still immune
Of that grey mischief, and a coming June,
Instinct with virtues of the South serene,

Shall shape thy blossoms in the primal mould,
Heap thy broad members with a fruit of gold,
And dower thy foliage with eternal green !

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